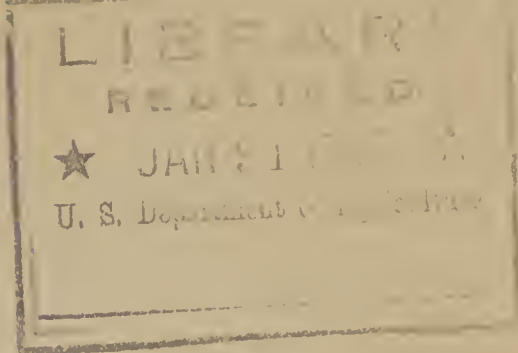


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RELEASE FOR PUBLICATION  
JANUARY 23, 1935 (WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON)

WILD LIFE MANAGEMENT AND THE NATIONAL FORESTS

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By F. A. Silcox, Chief of the Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture. Delivered before the 21st Annual Game Conference at New York City on Wednesday afternoon, January 23, 1935.

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Since the mythical days of Robin Hood, wild life has inseparably been associated with the forests. And in America, as industry and agriculture advanced westward, the natural ranges of many wild life species became more and more restricted to, and with, forest regions. In fact, so marked has this wild life retreat been that the federally owned national forests in the West are estimated to comprise, today, close to 75% of the total big game ranges of the Western United States.

Real management of forest and woodland resources contributes in great degree to the welfare of wild life. The widely conceded fact that wild life has, in general, decreased, and is still decreasing, on much of the forest land in this country is, therefore, to be expected. For of the 495 million acres classed as commercial forest land, nearly three-fourths of which is in private ownership, more than 41 million acres have been burned over annually in recent years; more than 74 million acres have been left in devastated or poorly stocked condition; more than 380 million acres have lacked such management as might, under any stretch of the imagination, keep them productive.



The beneficial influence of forest management on wild life has been demonstrated on 167 million acres within the national forests. For here, despite the decrease of wild life on forest lands in general, game animals are estimated to have increased 100 percent between the years 1921 and 1933. So, with the addition - through an enlarged acquisition program - to national forest areas in the East, the South and the Lake States, there is real interest in the principles under which national forests and their resources have been and will be administered.

That interest is widespread. It is evident at this, the twenty-first American Game Conference. It embraces, within and near the national forests, patrons and guests of more than 5,000 ranches and farms and more than 500 Dude Ranches operated primarily for recreation. It extends to more than 13 million hunters and fishermen throughout the length and breadth of the land. And it has to do with a wild life resource the total positive national value of which has been estimated by the Biological Survey at more than \$1,000,000,000 annually!

As I conceive it, our forest problem is primarily a social one. It involves the management of forest lands and their resources - including those within the national forests - so that they may contribute, with security and stability, to the welfare of their fair share of the country's population. So, since more than 1,300,000 people are employed yearly in forest, forest industry and allied work during normal times; since national forest resources are many and varied; since more than 750,000 people living in or near those forests are dependent upon their resources; since more than 13 million people use them for recreation each year, those forests must be managed on the principle of multiple-use.

This multiple-use principle is not new. It has been applied to the national forests for more than 30 years. It is the system under which, on those forests, game animals have increased 100 percent in 12 years in the face of an increase of more than 300 percent in the number of forest recreationists - including hunters





and fishermen--within the period 1916-1934. And yet, despite this gratifying increase, there is room for improvement in the wild-life situation.

For on most national forest areas the numbers--and in many cases the species--of wild game can materially be increased under adequate methods of game management. It will not be sufficient, to accomplishing this purpose, merely to remove the causes which have led to destruction or decimation of wild life species. More constructive action is necessary. Modern game management must go farther; must devise ways and means to make more favorable environments and thus produce more, and more varied, wild life.

There are, as has been said, many national forest areas on which, under modern game management, the numbers and species of wild life can materially be increased. But there are also some areas which are already too heavily populated with big game. Witness the areas used by the Sun River elk herd, for example. This herd has increased way beyond the carrying capacity of its winter range. Damage to forage crop, heavy winter losses through starvation, and accelerated erosion have resulted. Witness, too, continued overgrazing by deer on certain national forests in the Southwest and elsewhere. On areas such as these, adjustments must be made in order to protect both the big game and the forage upon which it depends.

Forage is a major resource of the national forests. It provides, in the West alone, feed for some 75 percent of the West's big game. It also furnishes sustenance for more than 1,400,000 cattle and 6,000,000 sheep owned by some 26,000 individual persons. And those people, their ranches, and the communities they support are (through livestock) just as dependent upon this forage as is big game. So that national forest forage materially and directly contributes, through domestic stock and big game, to the permanence and stability of our social and economic structure.





Good business dictates, then, that the supply of forage be so maintained and used that wild game and domestic stock may both contribute in highest measure to this social and economic structure. This presents the problem of coordinating forage supply with numbers of animals dependent upon it. In analyzing this problem, it is obvious that coordination is impossible unless there be adequate control of the maximum number of animals.

Domestic animals are controlled on the national forests. Permits specify areas on which, and periods within which, they may graze. In addition, numbers are limited within specific areas. But most States never have delegated nor exercised control over maximum numbers of wild game. It has, therefore, been impossible under existing conditions to secure coordination between the supply of national forest forage and the number of game animals dependent upon it. As a result, some national forest areas are overgrazed by a combination of domestic stock and big game, some are overgrazed by big game alone. And there are vast areas on which the numbers and species of wild life can and should materially be increased.

These, briefly, are the specific reasons which led the Secretary of Agriculture to issue that regulation, the purpose of which is to provide such maximum of wild life population - on federally owned and managed national forests - as will, under management, permit adequate protection, development, and utilization of all national forest resources.

You and I know that despite the cooperative attitude of State Game Commissioners, this purpose has not in the past been accomplished. Looking at the wild life resource broadly, correlation and continuity of planning and execution have been lacking; both the States and the Forest Service have failed to redeem their responsibilities. Some progress has been made, it is true. But that progress is spotty. It has been decidedly inadequate.



Regulation G-20-A has, therefore, been so devised that the Forest Service may - if, as, and when necessary - take the initiative and responsibility which, imposed upon it by Congress, will permit of more adequate development and correlated use of this, as well as other, national forest resources.

It is hoped, frankly, that such initiative will not be necessary. There is reason for that hope. There are States which - largely on their own initiative - are now meeting local situations in a definite and constructive manner. In such States, direct Federal initiative is not contemplated. There are other states in which adequate local action seems reasonably certain now that federal initiative is in the offing. If in these States present prospects are translated into prompt and adequate action, direct Federal initiative will not be necessary there.

But there are other States in which - despite the cooperative attitude of game commissioners and continuous efforts by the Forest Service - no action, or obviously inadequate action, is in prospect. I want to make it perfectly clear that in such States, and under such circumstances, the Forest Service intends to take the initiative; to assume responsibility for such measures as may be necessary to effectuate, on the national forests, the purposes for which Regulation G-20-A has been promulgated.

It should also be understood that application of the regulation will be to specific cases where cooperation has failed. In each case an intensive field investigation by competent authorities selected by the Department will be made, in cooperation with representatives of the States and, if they care to participate, by other interested agencies as well.



Reference has been made to failures to redeem responsibilities. There are reasons for such failures, of course. Many reasons. For example: - State Game Commissions are in most cases subject to legislative action. All too often, those legislatures are loath to delegate such real power. So that rarely do State Game Commissions have authority to establish and adequately carry out policies which they know are vital to real progress of wild life development, management and use. Local trends seem to tie most Commissions, through State game laws, to virtual restriction of consumption with little or no chance for adequate encouragement of production. And in numerous instances State game laws and regulations, including bag limits and seasons, are so inflexible that they defeat the very purpose for which they were passed.

There are other reasons for past failures. Explorations by the Forest Service show, for example, the need for nearly 34 million additional acres in order to provide adequate feed for that wild life which now uses the national forests. To be effective, this additional range must be adjacent or contiguous to the 167 million national forest acres which that game now uses. It is no small job to provide this acreage. For it involves more than 13 million acres already included in approved national forest purchase units, more than 14 million acres of Public Domain, and some 6 million acres of privately owned lands which, suitable for winter range, are in effect the key to many national forest ranges now used by wild game.







This raises the question of jurisdiction as it affects wild life. State legislatures do not, of course, have jurisdiction over Federal national forest lands or the many uses which are (or may be) made of these lands and their resources. So that it is impossible for State legislatures - or their Game Commissions - to correlate or control the use of forage upon which - in the Western National Forests alone - some 75 percent of all Western big game now depend for a large part of their existence.

This question of jurisdiction works both ways. For as has been said, without Federal jurisdiction over wild life on the national forests, adequate progress in the wild life field has not been made - either directly or through Game Commissions in many States. The result has been over-population with its attendant evils in some cases; under-population and under-use in many others; lack of such action as would provide for adequate protection and use of present, or development of future, national forest wild life resources. And, in addition, there has been an inability to provide that planned and correlated use of the basic resource, forage, which is essential to the very existence of big game and to social and economic welfare, as well.

Conditions such as those mentioned lead to confusion, to a well defined tendency to defend unsatisfactory conditions by denial of responsibility, to a feeling of frustration too easily and too often translated into inaction. Danger to the present and future of our wild life resource is an inevitable result. Failure to recognize this situation and to remedy it, would be unfortunate, to say the least.



Regulation G-20-A recognizes the situation. It is intended as a remedy. Every effort is being made to have an early, clear-cut determination of such legal issues as may be involved. If, under State laws, national forest areas can be so managed as to produce a maximum of wild life consistent with coordinated priorities for other resources and uses, there need be no fear of the application of this regulation. But if, under State laws, this result cannot be obtained, then--subject to decision on such legal issues as there may be--Regulation G-20-A will be invoked and, upon approval by the Secretary of Agriculture, applied to specific national forest areas.

Under such conditions, and in such circumstances, this new regulation is in no way inconsistent with the primary purposes of delegates to this American Game Conference, of State officials, or of State laws on wild life matters. It merely provides an optional means by which those purposes can be attained.

